



Transitioning to a New Model? First Consider Your Organizational Culture



The decision to transition my organization from the Capability Maturity Model® for Software (SW-CMM®) to CMM Integration (CMMI®) was not an easy one. We had spent the previous decade immersed in change, growing from an ad-hoc organization to becoming the first Department of Defense software engineering house to achieve full SW-CMM Level 5 compliance. It has been a rewarding and arduous journey. However, the advent of CMMI led us to the proverbial crossroads in the path we were traveling: Do we plunge in and incorporate the additional CMMI practices into our organizational processes and in so doing stay at the leading edge of process maturity? Or do we simply utilize the robust software process improvement infrastructure we had developed to incrementally get better and better over time? The last question was actually a compelling argument against transitioning to the CMMI model. After all, the ability to affect continuous process improvement was the reason we adopted the Level 4 and 5 key practices of the SW-CMM in the first place.

In the end, the concern over the planned obsolescence of the SW-CMM model and the additional benefits of CMMI swung the debate in favor of the transition. I knew it was the right thing to do, but nonetheless had apprehensions about leading our team in that direction. How would this decision be received by my senior staff and our sizeable work force? I feared it could be viewed as more change for change's sake, or simply as an attempt to keep up with the latest management fad. If handled incorrectly, I could create an entire organization of process improvement cynics!

I knew that I needed to communicate our goals and objectives to every employee. So I visited with each unit and explained how we had benefited from the SW-CMM, why we needed to transition to CMMI, how I expected CMMI would benefit us, how we planned to make the transition, and how the transition would affect each of them as individuals. I can't say that everyone was excited about making the change, but everyone understood why we were doing it; they supported it and made it happen. More importantly, I discovered that we had developed something very special over the previous 10 years of incorporating model-based process improvement: We institutionalized an evolutionary change of sorts across our organization, developing the modern-day survival equivalent of the chameleon's ability to adapt to changing environments. We had created an organizational culture that understands and accepts change. That may ultimately prove to be one of the greatest values to us that have resulted from our SW-CMM, and now CMMI, compliance.

Dr. Kenneth Shere observes in his article, *Managing Cultural Changes in Your Organization*, that process improvement causes cultural change, change is hard, and that one must have a compelling reason for change. I encourage you to take advantage of his recommendations when embarking on your next organizational change adventure.

Another recent change being accepted by my organization affects CROSSTALK as I move Tracy Stauder from the CROSSTALK publisher position into a supervisory position. Tracy has supported CROSSTALK since 1996 when she took the lead in its production. In cooperation with our organization's desire to implement consistent CMM processes, Tracy formalized and documented CROSSTALK's production processes. Those who have been subscribing to CROSSTALK since before she joined might have noticed that as a result of her leadership, CROSSTALK's production became much more predictable and the quality also improved.

These improvements reflect Tracy's outstanding contributions to my organization. Her leadership talents will benefit her new group, and this opportunity will reward her excellent work. One basic concept of process maturity is that by having established processes in place, an organization will not depend on one hero to keep it running. Tracy was a hero, but was also true to our process improvement initiatives, which will ensure CROSSTALK's continued quality in this evolutionary change.

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